

Budget cuts set to shutter 56 county courtrooms

WFD 4-18-12 Daily Breeze

SOUTH BAY: Torrance, Inglewood and airport facilities are affected.

By C.J. Lin and Larry Altman
Staff Writers

A state-ordered cut of \$30 million to the Los Angeles Superior Court system will prompt the closure of 56 courtrooms countywide and layoffs of 350 workers, and result in the "erosion of access to justice," an official said Tuesday.

The cuts, the largest in memory, will mean the closure of 24 civil, 24

criminal, three family law, one probate and four juvenile delinquency courtrooms, according to Lee Edmon, presiding judge of the Los Angeles County Superior Court system.

Locally, the June 30 closures will affect courtrooms in Torrance, Del Aire, Long Beach and Inglewood.

At the Torrance courthouse, the closures include the shutdown of Judge William Willett's civil courtroom and Commissioner Steven Berman's courtroom. Berman handles misdemeanor criminal matters.

Also on the list for closure is Judge Jacquelyn Connor's criminal courtroom at the Airport Courthouse in Del

Aire, two Inglewood courtrooms — one that handles civil harassment, traffic and small-claims cases and another that hears juvenile cases — and two criminal courtrooms and a small-claims courtroom in Long Beach.

Because judges cannot be laid off, those affected by the closures will be reassigned or forced to share courtrooms and staff with other judges, Edmon said.

Among them is Judge Lance Ito, who became Los Angeles' most famous judge when he presided over the O.J. Simpson murder trial in 1995.

COURTS A13

Affected South Bay and Long Beach courtrooms

Torrance

- Department 11 — General civil
- Department 6 — Misdemeanor criminal

Inglewood

- Department N — Civil harassment, traffic trials, small claims and domestic violence temporary restraining orders
- Department 241 — Juvenile delinquency

Airport

- Department C — Felony criminal

Long Beach

- Department L — Criminal
- Department 10 — Criminal
- Department 4 — Small claims, temporary restraining orders, civil harassment and unlawful detainers

Witnesses detail jail beatings

Tues 4-17-12

Daily Breeze

COUNTY: Chaplain and ACLU monitors describe abuse by deputies.

By Christina Villacorte
Staff Writer

Horrific details of alleged abuse at the hands of deputies inside the Los Angeles County Men's Central Jail were revealed Monday when a chaplain and ACLU jail monitors testified before a panel about beatings they witnessed.

Deacon Paulino Juarez-Ramirez, a chaplain with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, told the Citizens Commission on Jail Violence that he witnessed three beatings, including one inside a chapel.

He said the first incident occurred

in 2000, when about half a dozen deputies attacked an inmate for proceeding to walk toward the chapel after they had ordered him to stop in the hallway.

The chaplain said deputies slammed the inmate against a wall, then punched and kicked him repeatedly until another chaplain intervened, yelling, "Please, stop this!"

In the second incident, Juarez-Ramirez said he, another chaplain and a volunteer witnessed deputies beating an inmate handcuffed to a bench in 2004.

He said the inmate got into a verbal altercation with deputies, who pummeled him even after he stopped resisting.

The third incident, which occurred in 2009, prompted the chaplain to leave Men's Central Jail in fear.

Juarez-Ramirez said he saw several deputies beating an inmate inside a cell. He said three deputies were punching and kicking an inmate who was not fighting back.

During the attack, he said, the deputies repeatedly yelled, "Stop fighting! Stop resisting!" even after the inmate had fallen on the floor, blood pooling around his head.

The chaplain paused during his testimony, overcome by emotion.

"I just was terrified," he said.

Juarez-Ramirez was able to meet with Sheriff Lee Baca two years after the incident. During the meeting, he said, Baca reprimanded his staff for not telling him about the abuse.

The American Civil Liberties Union has been a court-appointed monitor of the Los Angeles County jail system since 1985.

One jail monitor, Esther Lim, testified Tuesday that she also saw several deputies beating and kicking an inert inmate while yelling, "Stop fighting! Stop resisting!"

She said one of them also used his Taser multiple times.

"It was really frightening what I had seen, especially given that I had already heard countless inmates telling me about being beaten by deputies," she said. "I had also heard of retaliation, and so the fear really set in after I saw the beating."

Both she and another ACLU jail monitor, Mary Tiedeman, shed tears while testifying about the abuse.

Gabriel Carrillo said he himself was beaten by deputies in 2011, when he was trying to visit his incarcerated brother at Men's Central Jail.

He said deputies put him in a room after discovering his girlfriend had a cellphone with her. Cellphones are barred from the premises.

He said they punched and kicked him until he blacked out. They also allegedly pepper-sprayed him.

Carrillo has sued the Sheriff's Department.

The county Board of Supervisors created the Citizens Commission on Jail Violence to investigate alleged abuse within the county jail system, and make recommendations. It took no action during Tuesday's meeting, but is scheduled to meet again next month.

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Shooting leaves town stunned

Greenland, N.H., reels after its police chief killed eight days before retirement.

BY TINA SUSMAN

NEW YORK — Michael Maloney was just eight days from retiring as police chief of the tiny town of Greenland, N.H. — just eight days from leaving 26 years in law enforcement for the freedom to golf, fish, enjoy his family and maybe find another job. But there was one thing he needed to do.

It was a thankless task: helping to serve a warrant on a man with a rap sheet that included assault and drug charges. And it was the kind of job Maloney insisted on doing himself rather than leaving to others, say those who knew the chief, who was killed by a bullet to the head as he carried out his final mission Thursday.

Maloney, 48, was one of five officers shot as they tried to enter Cullen Mutrie's home. The other four came from neighboring law enforcement agencies and were part of an attorney general's drug task force. Two were treated and released; two others remained hospitalized Friday and were expected to survive.

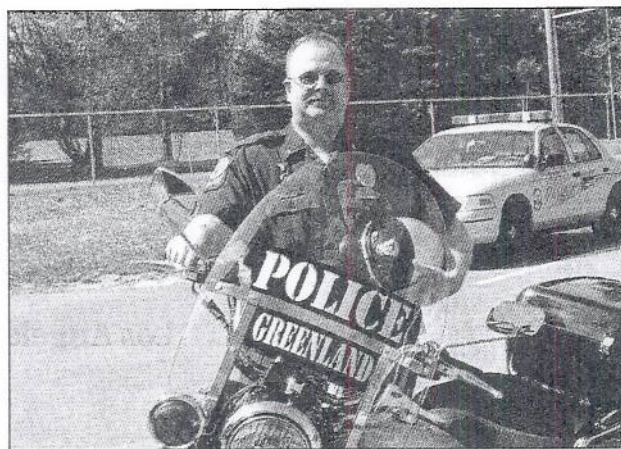
New Hampshire was stunned by the shootings, which led to an overnight standoff that ended with Mutrie dead of a gunshot wound. New Hampshire has lost only two law enforcement officers in the line of duty since 2000, the FBI says. The last time was in May 2007, according to DMP.org, the Officer Down Memorial Page, which monitors deaths of law enforcement officers nationwide.

"Chief Maloney was a working chief that would never ask his officers to do something that he wouldn't do," Greenland's town administrator, Karen Anderson, who had worked with him closely for six years, told the Times. "He led by example, and it was normal for



JIM COLE Associated Press

FLOWERS ARE PLACED at a memorial for Greenland Police Chief Michael Maloney, who was shot while serving a warrant. Four others were injured.



CHIEF MALONEY, in an undated photograph, "was a working chief that would never ask his officers to do something that he wouldn't do," a town official said.

him to participate in police activities."

In one of her last conversations with Maloney, he told her "there was one more matter that he could not talk about, that he would take care of" before retiring April 20, Anderson told reporters in Greenland's Town Hall. "He was there last night with them — that was it," said an official standing with her when asked what that last "matter" might have been.

Outside, the flag was at half-staff as the sun rose and word spread of the night's

carnage. The violence was a particular shock for quiet Greenland, where the population is about 3,500 and the police force numbers just seven, in addition to the chief. Its last recorded homicide was in 2004, according to police records.

Mutrie's name was on some of Greenland's police reports. In 2010, he was charged with assaulting his then-girlfriend after allegedly "grabbing her hair and her right arm." He was found guilty, given a suspended 30-day sentence, and ordered to



Sources: ESRI, TeleAtlas, USGS
Los Angeles Times

undergo an anger-management evaluation.

Last year, he was charged with possession of controlled narcotics, including anabolic steroids. In 2005, when Mutrie was living in Seabrook, N.H., police refused to grant him a license to carry a firearm because of earlier problems with the law.

Mutrie also spent time as a member of the nearby Hampton Falls Fire Department. "After a few years of very limited participation, Mr. Mutrie resigned from the department to pursue other interests in July 2010," the town's fire chief, Jay M. Lord, said in a statement.

Lord said Mutrie, 29, never had disciplinary problems while with the department. "This is what ... can happen when people go in the wrong direction," he told reporters of Mutrie, whose Facebook page listed his main interests as "school," "anything exciting," and "working out."

Lee Miller, who lives about 30 feet from Mutrie's home, heard the gunshots and saw at least one of the victims lying in the driveway as others performed first aid. Miller told reporters that Mutrie was a nightmare neighbor who "terrorized" others on the street and whose home was a frequent scene of loud fights and traffic screaming in and out at all hours. Miller told the Boston Herald she had seen Mutrie shooting at groundhogs in his backyard.

His mother, Beverly Mutrie of Hampton Falls, said, "All I can say is it's a shame,"

reported the Boston Herald, which added that she would not say when she had last spoken to her son.

Police did not immediately identify a woman found dead of a gunshot wound in the house with Mutrie, and they said they were not sure whether the pair died in a murder-suicide or a double suicide. The state attorney general, Michael Delaney, said their bodies were found shortly after 2 a.m.

Delaney said gunfire erupted as officers tried to enter the house to serve the warrant at 6 p.m. A negotiating team "had some brief conversation" with Mutrie in an attempt to end the standoff as Maloney and the wounded officers were taken away by ambulances. "But that conversation ended shortly thereafter, and for a long period of the evening there was no contact with the individuals inside the residence," Delaney said at a news conference.

After hours of silence, a robot equipped with a camera was sent into the house and detected the bodies.

"It's a blow to all of us. It's New Hampshire. It's Greenland. It's not supposed to happen here," said John Penacho, chairman of Greenland's Board of Selectmen. His words echoed the shock of everyone from the governor to the Buckhorn Diner waitress who often served Maloney.

"He was a wonderful man," the waitress, Janet Grant, told CBS, adding that the chief always had a smile on his face when he dropped by for a piece of pie.

"Eight days away from retiring," said Jason MacKenzie, owner of the Suds N' Soda sporting goods shop, who on his store's Facebook page said Maloney was "a morning fixture." Just this week, he said, the two had joked about Maloney going to work at the store after retirement.

"I wish you actually worked with me ... you'd still be alive," MacKenzie wrote.

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The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Sheriff favors closing much of aging jail

WED 4-11-12 LA Times

[Baca, from AA1]
here about all of a sudden we've been put in a corner."

Instead, Baca said his new outlook was spurred by a report commissioned by the American Civil Liberties Union that found that Los Angeles County's jail population could be reduced by, among other measures, increasing the number of inmates who are released back to the public and monitored electronically.

Baca said another development was the opportunity to house some inmates at fire camps that have been used for state prisoners, and moving other inmates to facilities outside the county.

Baca declined to give a timeline for the closure.

For years, Men's Central has been Baca's most troubled lockup, plagued by inmate killings, excessive force by guards and poor supervision. About 1,800 inmates, many of them the county's most violent, would have to be moved to other sheriff's facilities.

If adopted, the plan would solve what has long been a major problem for the

department: housing the most violent inmates in an antiquated facility. Men's Central is designed with long rows of cramped cells, rather than the more modern circular configuration that makes controlling inmates, supervising jailers and protecting employees significantly easier.

But closing the section of Men's Central would reduce the number of total inmates the system can handle.

The Sheriff's Department already releases some inmates early because of a lack of funding and is expected to receive thousands of new inmates under a plan that is sending to county jails offenders who previously landed in state prison.

County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich warned against shutting down Men's Central without a "comparable replacement," saying such an action would "release criminals into our communities" and make "a mockery of our criminal justice system."

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Missteps on child welfare

Children may be poorly served by state and local governments — but not in the ways the public thinks.

THE BUREAU OF State Audits reported in late March on troubling but familiar problems in Los Angeles County's child welfare system: Abuse investigations continue to take longer than the state's standard 30 days to complete. Although the county had a temporary waiver allowing social workers here to take twice as long, there was confusion over the applicable standard, and too many investigations remained untimely even with the extra time. The problem was exacerbated, if not caused, according to the report, by constant churning of leadership in the department and, as a result, by constant changes in marching orders from the top to front-line child welfare workers.

None of that is much of a surprise. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has repeatedly fired directors of the Department of Children and Family Services and changed the oversight structure. It's no wonder that they have had such trouble finding replacements for ousted directors, and no wonder that social workers sometimes don't know which way to turn. The supervisors have now placed Philip Browning in charge of the department, and they hope — and we hope with them — that the instability in leadership is at an end; we also hope that they have sufficient faith in Browning that he can tell them "no" when he needs to without fearing for his job.

Of possibly even greater concern than unmet standards and the leadership shuffle, however, are two items that are not in the audit at all but are closely connected with it and have largely escaped notice.

First, it's important to remember that the Bureau of State Audits originally undertook a probe of four county child welfare systems: Fresno, Alameda and Sacramento, as well as Los Angeles. The report on the other three counties came out in October, and it was noteworthy and deeply troubling for reasons we'll get to in a moment. Why wasn't Los Angeles County included in that report? Because the Board of Supervisors refused to cooperate and flouted subpoenas from the bureau.

It took a lawsuit and ultimately an act of the state Legislature to specifically instruct the county to turn over the subpoenaed documents and to protect it from legal liability. Only then could the audit of Los Angeles County proceed. It is an example of the board's secretiveness on matters involving the public welfare and the supervisors' legal and moral responsibilities to operate in the open.

The second concern involves the 2008 beating death of a 10-year-old Fresno boy and pending legislation about sex offenders. If it's hard to see the connection between those incidents and last month's audit of the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, that, in a way, is the point.

The audit in L.A. was part of the original audit ordered in reaction to the killing of Seth Ireland of Fresno by his mother's boyfriend. Should Fresno child welfare workers have known the boy was in danger? Could they have prevented his death? The public

directed its outrage at county workers, the child welfare department and, ultimately, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. Someone, the public demanded, should do something.

Fresno City Councilman Henry T. Perea — who, it is interesting to note, is the son of a member of the Board of Supervisors — was elected to the state Assembly in 2010 and asked state Auditor Elaine M. Howle to probe county response to reports of child abuse. He initially wanted all counties to be included, but that would be too long and too expensive a task for the audits bureau, so he limited the request to his county and the biggest counties in three different sections of the state.

The first report, covering Fresno, Alameda and Sacramento, was released in October, and it set off a firestorm. Instead of leading with responses to Perea's questions about child abuse investigations, the Bureau of State Audits went off on a tangent and reported on how well the state Department of Social Services checks names on the Department of Justice's Sex and Arson Registry — even though the Seth Ireland case and Perea's audit request had nothing to do with sex offenders. The bureau reported more than 1,000 matches between addresses on that registry and addresses of "licensed facilities." Because it was an audit of child welfare, the report left the impression that those facilities were foster homes and that the state had housed abused and neglected children with 1,000 sex offenders. Web headlines were immediate: State officials placed 1,000 foster children in homes with sex offenders! And the public reaction was swift as well: Government officials, government programs and child welfare workers are worse than incompetent.

The Web and newspaper stories were wrong — but understandably so, given the sloppiness with which the audit was written and presented. Licensed facilities run a gamut that includes adult day-care centers, and the address matchups showed only that a registered sex offender may have once lived at an address that had become a licensed facility. It turns out that there were perhaps 31 — not 1,000 — registered sex offenders who had "some association" with foster homes.

But the false data had gone viral and done their damage, reinforcing a public belief that government recklessly endangers children. Did it sign up sex offenders to be foster parents? It did not. Does it routinely place abused and neglected children with sex offenders? It does not. In fact, government may be poorly serving children — but not necessarily for the reasons now lodged in the public imagination.

Does that matter? Certainly. Perea has introduced legislation increasing the criminal penalties on registered sex offenders for residing in state-licensed facilities — even though there is no evidence of a problem with sex offenders at such facilities. It has nothing to do with child abuse or with the death of Seth Ireland, but it does respond to the headlines spurred by his request for an audit. The public demanded that someone "do something." Perea did something.

It is an example of the thousands of bills that move through the Legislature each year that grow out of misunderstanding, shoddy reporting and misdirected public outrage rather than a considered response to an identified problem.

Deputies' abuse at jail described

Clergy members and civilian monitors tell panel that officers beat prisoners and bullied witnesses.

BY ROBERT FATURECHI

A Los Angeles County commission investigating jail abuse heard tearful testimony Monday from clergy and civilian monitors who worked in the lockups and said they witnessed deputies assaulting inmates and bullying witnesses to keep quiet.

One jail monitor broke down as she recounted being intimidated by a deputy whom she said saw beat an unconscious inmate.

A weeping jail chaplain described deputies calling him a rat after he reported another beating.

In one case, a clergy member said he was told by gang member inmates that jailers had targeted them in retribution for the slaying of a deputy by members of their gang on the outside.

When the deputy's widow heard the allegations, the chaplain said, she showed up at the jail and told the deputies they disgraced her husband's memory.

The commission was created by the Board of Supervisors soon after news broke last year that the FBI was investigating allegations of inmate abuse and other jailer misconduct.

The panel's investigation is loosely modeled on that of the landmark Christopher Commission, which recommended sweeping reforms of the Los Angeles Police Department after the 1991 beating of motorist Rodney G. King.

Soon after, a graveyard-themed jailhouse mural was vandalized, with someone scrawling "Olmsted RIP" on an image of a tombstone.

Horan said some deputies on the 3000 floor grew overly aggressive and cliquish until the problem came to a head in 2010, when deputies from the floor got into a brawl with fellow jailers at a department Christmas party.

He said deputies on that floor hassled a fellow jailer, who had a reputation of being respectful with inmates, so much that the deputy asked for a transfer.

He was being called names like "Deputy Love," Horan said.

Sister Patty Bartlett, who also works in the jails, testified that she has heard multiple allegations of abuse from inmates, including some who told her deputies intentionally open jailhouse gates separating rival inmates to encourage fights.

Horan and Bartlett said that in recent months, management and conditions at the Men's Central Jail have improved vastly.

Horan said the new cameras that were installed amid scrutiny of jail abuse have allowed deputies to no longer feel conflicted about covering up on behalf of their "comrades" because the misconduct probably will be caught on video.

Sheriff's spokesman Steve Whitmore said the department supports the commission's work.

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On Monday, the commission's lead attorney revealed that after protests from the deputies' union, the commission would no longer be getting unfettered access to disciplinary records.

Instead, the commission is expected to receive data that identifies deputies not by name but by unique numbers, so that potential problem jailers can be identified.

One commissioner expressed concern that the concession might "impair" the investigation, but the commission's director downplayed the restrictions, saying that its aim is rooting out systemic problems, not going after individual deputies.

Among those who spoke before the commission was former American Civil Liberties Union jail monitor Mary Tiedeman, who wept as she told the panel she had resigned her post after becoming fed up with the department's inaction despite all the allegations of abuse she was gathering.

Many of the speakers emphasized how strong an effect the captain at Men's Central Jail can have on jailer culture.

Retired Cmdr. Robert Olmsted, who last year told The Times of his attempts to warn sheriff's officials about abuse, was praised by civilian monitors and clergy for being tough on deputies.

His successor, Capt. Daniel Cruz, who was placed on leave after an investigation of his tenure was launched, was accused by witnesses Monday of loosening the reins on problem deputies.

Tiedeman testified that top sheriff's officials told her they were aware of mismanagement by Cruz but said it was difficult to correct his actions because of internal politics.

In February, The Times reported that Olmsted said he had tried to give Cruz a lackluster performance review, but his report was altered by a top sheriff's official and Cruz was protected.

Father George Horan testified that when Olmsted was promoted out of the jail, some deputies were relieved to be freed from his watch.

Audit results

Re "Missteps on child welfare," April 9

The Times claimed that results of an audit requested of child welfare departments in several counties failed to provide any noteworthy details concerning safety.

One finding ignored by the editorial was about children killed by abusers. Their deaths are often overlooked by county agencies because there is no law ordering a review for each case. The audit also found registered sex offenders living at state-licensed facilities such as day-care centers. This was surprising.

I introduced two bills to address these inexcusable findings and to provide a layer of protection for our children. The Times should take a second look at the audit results and see a need for change in a system crying out for a legislative fix.

HENRY T. PEREA
Fresno
The writer, a Democrat, represents California's 31st Assembly District.

L.A. courts to be cut \$30 million

WFO 4-18-12 L.A. Times

Latest reductions will close 56 courtrooms and eliminate 350 employees.

By ASHLEY POWERS
AND ALEXANDRA ZAVIS

The sprawling Los Angeles County court system, which already lopped \$70 million from its budget this fiscal year, will slash an additional \$30 million in the coming months by laying off workers, closing courtrooms and axing a Juvenile Court program, court officials said Tuesday.

The cuts comes as California's judicial budget,

which has been pared back in recent years as the state struggled economically, faces the potential loss of tens of millions of dollars in 2013 if a tax measure on the November ballot fails.

The perpetual state budget shortfalls have forced numerous courts to slash hours and staffing, delaying divorces and stretching out custody battles throughout California. But Los Angeles' trial court system is the nation's largest, making the effect of budget cuts particularly dramatic.

"These extraordinary actions cut into the core work of the courts," Presiding Judge Lee Smalley Edmon said in a statement. "With [See Courts, AA6]

Baca determined to close men's jail

WFO 4-11-12

Daily Beast

INMATES: Sheriff says deteriorated facility may be shut without replacement.

By Christina Villacorte Staff Writer

The Men's Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles is so run-down and poorly designed, Sheriff Lee Baca said Tuesday, that he is committed to shutting it down even if a replacement facility is not built.

The sheriff's remarks were made during a press conference for the release of a report recommending improvements at MCJ, which has been criticized not only for its

JAMS A9

BACA FOR PARTIAL CLOSURE OF JAIL

Sheriff denies being influenced by official scrutiny of abuse in the county facilities.

By ROBERT FATURECHI

Facing an FBI investigation into brutality in his jails, Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca publicly committed Tuesday to shuttering much of his most problematic lockup, Men's Central Jail, barring some unexpected

In the past, Baca has tied the idea of shutting down the troubled downtown Los Angeles facility to the county agreeing to pay for an expensive new jail. The Times reported last month that Baca was now open to shutting down the old section of Men's Central — the epicenter of violent clashes between deputies and inmates — even without that new jail.

Speaking at a news conference outside sheriff's headquarters, Baca stated those plans publicly for the first time Tuesday. He dismissed the idea, however, that he was making the shift because of the intensified scrutiny in recent months of abuse inside his jails.

"Bear with me if it sounds like I'm changing my tune.... Investigations and allegations are not bases for rational management decisions," Baca said. "We're not talking [See Baca, AA4]

L.A. courts to be cut by \$30 million

[Courts, from AA1]
risks of more reductions on the horizon, we are already rationing justice.... The public cannot tolerate any further major service reductions."

Los Angeles courts have already laid off hundreds of employees and left more positions unfilled, resulting in longer lines to file paperwork and cases that piled along at a snail's pace.

This fiscal year, the system shaved \$70 million from its budget in part by freezing wages and forcing staff members to take furlough days. But it still needs to cut \$48 million more. The measures announced Tuesday will save the court system \$30 million, meaning that it will begin the next fiscal year with a deficit regardless of how much money state lawmakers dole out to the judicial system, spokeswoman Mary Hearn said.

By the end of June, the courts will have 350 fewer employees and 56 fewer courtrooms, which officials said will slow down the resolution of criminal, civil, fami-

ly court and juvenile delinquency cases.

Judges whose courtrooms are closed will be reassigned, officials said.

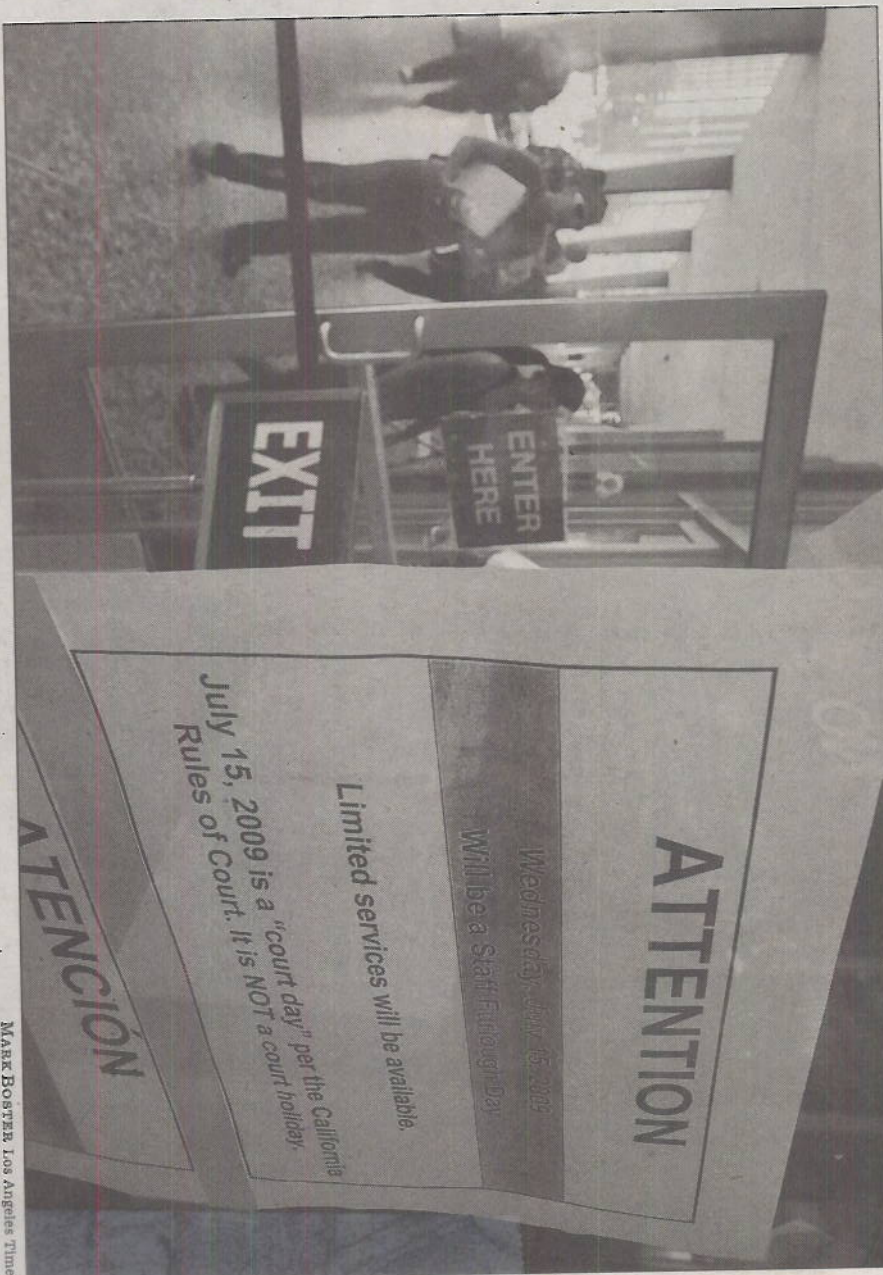
The courts will also stop providing court reporters for civil trials and pare back their use in motions hearings, meaning litigants will have to hire their own translators if they want to record testimony.

"Never before has a budget crisis dealt so crippling a blow to our court," Edmon and John Clarke, the court executive officer, wrote in a memo to staff.

Among the courts that will close are the four juvenile delinquency courts.

"When we cut courts, that means there is less time to spend on the cases," juvenile Court Presiding Judge Michael Nash said in a recent interview. "We have 20,000 kids on probation and we want to help those kids to turn their lives around. The less time you have to deal with them, the less likely you are going to be able to do that."

A program that annually



CUTBACKS IN 2009 resulted in staff furlough days. Even with the latest cuts, the court system will begin the fiscal year with a deficit, and if Gov. Jerry Brown's tax initiative fails even more cuts could be triggered.

sees more than 100,000 minors in trouble for low-level offenses faces elimination, as well.

The Superior Court's assistant presiding judge, David Wesley, said in a statement that the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court program was a "crucial element of the juvenile justice system."

"These courts have allowed us to address tens of

thousands of offenses in a more appropriate forum than delinquency court," he said.

Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed halting cuts to the judiciary next fiscal year; it lost \$350 million during the last budget cycle. But that depends on the fate of Brown's proposed tax initiative on the November ballot, which is expected to face fierce opposition from anti-

tax groups.

If the initiative fails, \$5.4 billion in so-called trigger cuts will take effect in January and yank \$125 million from the state court system, Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye told reporters this week.

"Since 2008, the judicial branch budget has seen an unprecedented cut in its ability to function, struggling mightily to provide jus-

tice for all," Cantil-Sakauye said at a news conference on the Capitol steps. "We're seeing 'Closed' signs in courtrooms up and down the state."

MARK BOSTER, Los Angeles Times

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Times staff writer Patrick McCreery in Sacramento contributed to this report.

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JAILS

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condition, but for a design that does little to prevent violence by deputies against inmates.

"I believe Men's Central Jail needs to be decommissioned," Baca said during a news conference at his Monterey Park headquarters Tuesday. "I'm committing to that goal."

He said only a spike in serious crime could derail the planned closure of MCJ, but he did not give a timeline for moving out of the crumbling facility whose oldest wing was built in 1963.

In order to close MCJ, Baca is considering various options to deal with inmates, from sending them to other counties to outfitting them with electronic monitoring devices.

Baca said his office has already reached out to privately run jails in Kern County, and is considering contracting with them. Their costs for holding inmates per day are lower than in L.A.

He is also thinking of contracting with fire camps, where inmates with nonviolent, nonsexual and nonserious offenses can train with and work alongside firefighters in exchange for a shortened sentence.

Baca also has plans to build a facility in Castaic exclusively for women inmates.

He added the proposal to build a new jail at the site of MCJ was still "on the table," but added it was no longer a prerequisite for shuttering the old jail.

When the proposal was first presented late last year, several members of the Board of Supervisors balked at the \$1 billion price tag for the new jail.

Baca is also seriously considering recommendations made by a prominent corrections expert, James Austin, in a study commissioned by the American Civil Liberties Union and released Tuesday. The ACLU has previously alleged there is a widespread pattern of deputies beating inmates at the jail.

Austin said MCJ could be shut down as early as the end of 2013 by safely releasing 3,000 low-risk pre-trial and sentenced inmates into community-based supervision and education programs that will curb recidivism.

Austin, who has a doctorate in sociology, heads the JFA Institute, based in Washington, D.C., and Malibu, that partners with government agencies around the country to study corrections issues.

He also called for increasing

the capacity of the county jail system by 2,000 beds by reutilizing existing facilities.

"This does have to happen quickly, because this (inmate population) is going up fast," Austin said, noting the county jail system will have an additional 7,000 inmates by 2014 because of realignment.

Assistant Sheriff Ceci Rhambo said the county jail system is already 75 percent full, because of realignment.

"If we don't get some things put in place in the next 90 to 120 days, we're probably going to have to start looking at easing some population pressure by releasing misdemeanors (after they serve only 10 percent of their time), but that's a last resort," Rhambo said.

Currently, those with misdemeanors serve 15 percent of their sentence before being released.

"We're in crisis mode now," said Margaret Winter, associate director of the ACLU National Prison Project.

"Those 7,000 people from realignment, they are coming, and it will put an incredible burden on the system," she said. "Unless we do something, we're going to see more tragedy."

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COURTS

FROM PAGE A1

His criminal courtroom downtown will go dark, and it will be reassigned to oversee a variety of cases where no judge is available, officials said.

Officials plan to monitor the impacts of closing 24 criminal courtrooms.

"The question that comes to mind is, 'Are we going to be able to live up to our statutory and constitutional deadlines on this for the speedy trial rights of the defendant?'" Edmon said. "We may have to adjust if we find out we've been too aggressive in the number of criminal courtrooms that we've closed."

Court reporters will no longer be available for civil trials, as 68 will be laid off and another 50 will be switched to part-time status. Another 100 noncourtroom staff members, such as clerks and managerial employees, will be laid off.

"We're familiar with the saying, 'Justice delayed is justice denied,'" Edmon said. "And unfortunately, this unavoidable result is going to result in the erosion of access to justice."

Also to be cut is the Informal Juvenile Traffic Court program, which for at least a decade has dealt with juveniles facing traffic offenses and other minor violations in an informal setting with their parents to keep them out of the delinquency system, according to officials.

"These courts have allowed us to address tens of thousands of offenses in a more appropriate forum than delinquency court," said Assistant Presiding Judge David Wesley. "We are losing a crucial element of the juvenile justice system to lack of funding."

Eric Webber, president of the L.A. County Bar Association, which has a membership

of more than 20,000 attorneys, said the cuts "are coming at a time when we have increased case filings. That, combined with now having far fewer courtrooms to adjudicate matters, means that the wait for justice literally grows longer. The wheels of justice are grinding to a halt."

Cases that could be taken care of in a day or two will now take several days or even a week, and that could prove dangerous for those who need protection from the courts, Webber said.

Darrell Mahood, court administrator of the department's branches in Torrance and Inglewood, said the cases in Willett's courtroom will be spread among four courtrooms.

The small-claims court, in an annex building to the rear of the Maple Avenue courthouse, will be moved into the main building.

"I believe the workload is doable from the judges' standpoint," Mahood said. "There may be some delays in processing some items. We have the same number of cases, so that's not going to change."

Court employees are waiting to learn their fates.

"This is not the best times we've had," Mahood said. "I think people are concerned

about it. I think people are worried about it."

The cuts to L.A.'s court system are part of \$652 million in budget reductions ordered across the state's judicial system. The court managed to cut \$70 million in the last fiscal year by freezing wages, instituting furloughs and eliminating staff positions.

In the past two years, 329 staffers were laid off, and another 229 staffers were lost through attrition, according to court officials.

Meanwhile, during the 2010-11 fiscal year, more than 2.9 million cases were filed countywide, according to court statistics.

Still, officials warn that another \$125 million in cuts could be on the way if Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed tax initiatives don't pass in November.

"The courts are supposed to be there for people to resolve disputes and get on with their lives and dispense justice," Webber said. "If the courts can't do that, then everybody suffers."

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